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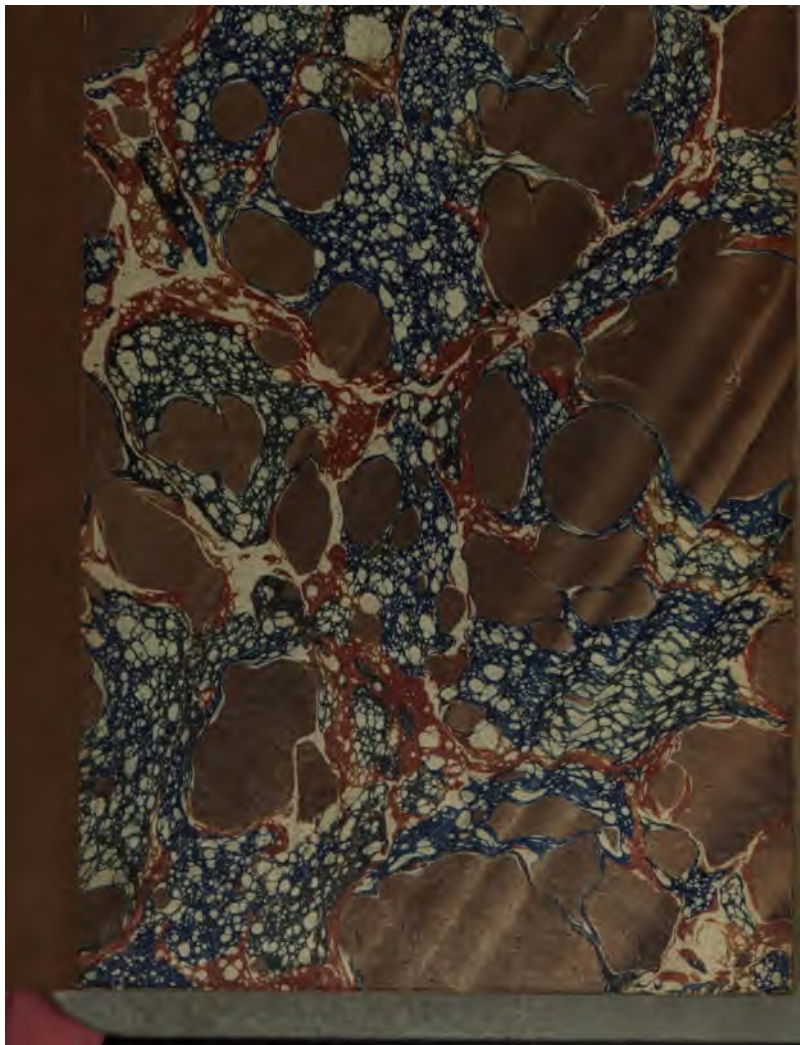
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COMIC SKETCHES

FROM THE WASSAIL BOWL.

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COMIC SKETCHES



FROM THE WASSAIL BOWL.

By Albert Smith,

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COMIC SKETCHES.

CHRISTMAS PANTOMIMES.



UZZA ! for Christmas : the hobbling old year has nearly limped away, and with it, we hope, all of grief or sadness that has occurred to dim its progress ; the time has arrived again when all that remains of harmless misrule and revelry in merrie England is about to revive from its long twelvemonth's trance, and once more kindle our hearts to enter

into the honest mirth and hospitality of our forefathers, before they became too expensive in their pleasures, and too knowing for such simple merriment.

True it is, that the ancient glories of Christmas have faded around our hearths since the blaze of the yule-log threw its cheerful light over the bright armour and quaint mouldings, the rollicking guests and antique furniture, of the old family-hall. The din of the mummers, and the potent spirits of the wassail-bowl, no longer contribute to *our revelry* ; the sickly melancholy of the modern drawing-

room ballad has supplanted the homely Anglo-Norman carol ; but, still, Christmas has returned, and with it such fun and joyousness as refinement now allows us to partake of.

At the head of all its gaieties, at least in our still childish opinion, stands the Pantomime. We really anticipate it for months before, and when, at last, the name is announced in the bills, our expectation has arrived at a pitch that is actually intolerable. Come with us to the theatre, dear reader, and take your place beside us. But you must go to the pit if you are our companion, for we mean, in all good truth, to enjoy ourselves and scream with laughter. Besides, we have never seen a pantomime from any other part of the house since we were very little, and we wish to enter as much as possible into old Christmas feelings and associations, and forget all of sorrow that has crossed our path since we first saw the huge curtain rise upon its wonders. How full the house is ! The first long piece has just finished, and everybody said simultaneously, as it concluded, " Now for the pantomime ! " We are in an excellent humour with ourselves and everybody around us. We do not grumble, as usual, at the persevering apple-women, when they push by our legs between the rows, selling tenpenny books for a shilling ; nor do we complain surlily of being too crowded : on the contrary, we are anxious that all should see the forthcoming spectacle, and enter into its fun as joyfully as ourselves. What a beautiful sight, too, is the multitude of children in the front rows ! Look at that pretty rogue in the third box from the lamps ; he has been asleep all through the tragedy, notwithstanding he *was put to bed for three hours in the middle of the day ; but now he is awake again, and is drumming his little fat hands*

on the red cushions of the box in a perfect agony of anticipation. Then those nice little girls near him, who are so angry with their brother, because he has just discovered a schoolfellow in the pit, and is wriggling about into all those odd telegraphic contortions that only little boys can perform when they wish to communicate at a distance.

Nor are we unoccupied in the pit. The majority of our companions are standing up to gaze at the boxes; and those two young men near us are alternately looking through one opera-glass at "that fine girl in pink under the sixth chandelier from the stage," and thinking "it must be Miss Herbert, only she wears her hair differently." The party who remained seated before us are passing round a little pocket-bottle of brandy-and-water to their friends. Watch the rough politeness with which the owner requests the gentleman by his side to "ask his good lady to take some," and the lady's pretty coquetry of refusal in accepting. "Do, ma'am, it'll do you good," says our friend, as he wipes the mouth of the bottle with his cuff; and then, with a *little* more pressing, the lady puts it to her lips and "just tastes it;" and then she blushes and laughs, and they all join in together, and the fat man in the brown coat winks his eye; and says it's "only toast and water."

But see! the orchestra is again filling: there is a great shuffling about of music-books, and the most eccentric running up and down of octaves you ever heard, as if all the different instruments were having a piece of fun to themselves. The leader has taken his seat—he looks right and left at the musicians, and then, tapping on his music-desk, the overture commences. It begins with a very long rumble, intending to express mystery, and bearing some resemblance to a wheelbarrow on the Margate jetty, set to

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music. It proceeds—they get excited—the sounds increase, and then wind up to one grand crash, previous to the introduction of the popular airs of the day. How the little heads in the boxes begin to nod the melody—how happy they are to hear the very tunes “that sister Ellen plays at home!” They would *encore* them all if the pantomime were not coming after; but, as it is, they applaud them with all the strength they can throw into their tiny hands; when the overture winds up with the concluding chords.

“Down! down in front!” “Have the goodness, sir, to remove your hat!” Now for it in earnest. There is a little more solemn music, all in the minor key; the prompter gives three knocks at his little pigeon-house door in the proscenium, and the curtain rises on the “Dungeons of Gloom in the kingdom of Discontent.” Fearful imps, with enormous heads, are wandering about the stage; and two, with cats’ faces, are blowing a fire that quite looks red-hot. We do not know what they say—we never hear, and, if we did, we should not understand; but they appear to be expecting some one, from the watchfulness with which they lay their great ears upon the ground. Then the stage



opens, and some red fire is lighted; the “Ore King of the

"Centre of the Earth" comes up the trap in his car, with two more demons at his feet. We are not to wonder where he is supposed to come from, or why he comes at all: the moment you criticise a pantomime, its interest is gone. It suffices to presume that he has some urgent business on



hand, and that the imps whom he intrusts with his commis-

sion are called Blue-blaze, Flicker-flame, Algaroth, Star-twinkle, and Night-shade ; and that, moreover, they are :



bent upon the same errand to the same place, and so all f off different ways.

Ten to one but the next scene is a castle. The music no *changes to a quaint hopping measure*, and an old port

waddles on, with such a head ! his body and legs look quite diminutive under it. Then a young lady appears at a window, throwing herself into all sorts of beautiful attitudes, and you see such a dreadful old woman pull her back again : and then, to keep her secluded, she, of course, brings her out of the door in front of the castle. Presently, a young knight enters, in brilliant armour, followed by his squire, with another large head. The young lady flies to the young knight ; the old woman pulls her back again ; the squire hits the "proud old porter" a tremendous thump on his chest with an enormous key, that knocks him through his own door ; and the knight and the young lady are going to fly away, when a gong beats, the walls of the castle sink, the side-scenes change, and you behold "the Dripping Fountain of the Enchanted Well," all silver leaf and blue fire. Here a little more action takes place, and the demons of the first scene are about to carry off the young lady, when the fountain opens, and a fairy comes out, tolerably dry, considering that she has just walked out of the water. You now see the knight, the lady, the nurse, and the squire, all sidling up towards the wings, with their hands behind their backs. The fairy speaks—their clothes become wrinkled and loose ; and, as she pronounces their respective names, the real pantomimists burst upon our delighted gaze.

Hurrah ! there's the Clown ! What a roar of laughter runs through the house as he crows, and throws a somerset, and greets us with his old familiar—"Here we are again ! how are you ?" And then, what a face he makes ! and how he walks upon his calves ! The Pantaloon doddles up, and of course tumbles over him ; then they take *Harlequin between them*, and turn him over, which feat ends in their

both been knocked down together by his wand ; then they run after Columbine, and go hands four round very fast ; then all slide up to the lamps, and back again ; and finally they make a hoop of themselves, and roll off at the side-scenes.

The business of the pantomime now commences in earnest ; but it is so rapid and laughter-provoking that we can scarcely follow it. There are some few things, however, we always expect. Of course, amongst the scenes, there will be a lodging-house, where the Clown will knock at the door, and then lie down on the steps for everybody to tumble over ; of course, he will steal some beer, and attempt to pour it into his pocket, and then pretend to scoop it up with his hand as it runs down his legs ; of course, there will be a coach-office, and linen-draper's shop ; and all the characters will have such names as Linendraper, Mr. Poplin ; Constable, Mr. Take'em-up ; Sweep, Master Chummy, (whom of course, the Clown puts into a milk-pail,) and the like : and the last scene is sure to be " the Hall of Dazzling Mirrors, in the Palace of Revolving Light," where all the pantomimists stand on their heads, and blue, red, and green fires are burnt alternately at the wings.

The curtain falls, and the spell is broken. The audience have been rapidly leaving for the last five minutes ; the men appear who envelope the rich mouldings and pillars of the boxes with canvass-wrappers ; and we betake ourselves, if it meets your pleasure, to one of the comfortable taverns in the neighbourhood, to enjoy a Welch rabbit and a pint of stout.

A VISIT TO GREENWICH FAIR.

ON Tuesday evening, March 29, 1842, Messrs. Mills, Barlow, and Saunders, three "medical young gentlemen," who, although they have passed their examinations, bear in mind the advice of a celebrated teacher, and "do not cease to consider themselves as students," or behave accordingly, honoured Greenwich fair with their presence.

The appointed trysting-place, previously to starting for the festive scene, was the Cheshire Cheese, in Wine-office Court, Fleet Street; an establishment which, in the scale of architectural creation, forms the link between the coffee-room and the menagerie, possessing the viands and the waiters of the one, and the saw-dust and feeding-time of the other. Having ordered various "muttons to follow," which, in the *patois* of this part of the world, is understood to mean consecutive chops, Mr. Barlow confidentially informed his friends, that the punch brewed at this house was rather extensive; whereupon, divers tumblers were perpetrated, and, overcome, either by the seductive beverage, or the bright eyes of the young lady who manufactured it, the three gentlemen indulged in divers facetious pastimes, to the great amusement of the rest of the company; finally, with the assistance of a burnt cork, converting the end of one of the boxes into the following singularly felicitous design:—



At half-past eight P.M. the party left Wine-office Court in a state of exceeding hilarity; and, observing a cab standing opposite the Bolt-in-Tun, stepped into it forthwith, but, on finding that it was waiting for a passenger, immediately stepped out again. Another like vehicle, however, coming by, they lost no time in engaging it, and, making a bargain for eighteenpence, told the driver to go in a similar manner to bricks, to the Surrey side of London Bridge. On their journey thither they indulged in various shouts, yells, and whistles, Mr. Mills, in particular, thrusting his head and shoulders out of the window, facetiously exclaiming to the passengers, "Here we are again! How are you?" after the manner of the celebrated *Mr. T. Mathews*. Mr. Barlow contented himself by sitting

very back, and chaunting a *mélange* from Norma, interspersed with airs from the Cyder Cellars; and Mr. Saunders amputated the tassel of one of the glasses, throwing it into the open window of the first omnibus that passed, which, in all probability, conveyed it to Brentford End.

They arrived at the terminus of the Greenwich Railway just in time to take their seats in one of the rattling boxes denominated by courtesy, second-class carriages, which, upon payment of sixpence each, they were permitted to enter. In two minutes the train moved on, and they were much edified by the continuous brick-fields and gas-manufacturies, whose localities they invaded, pronouncing the rapid dioramas of sectional habitations and domestic interiors which met their view, exceedingly interesting. The engine became a locomotive Asmodeus, hurrying them from roof to roof in quick succession, placing them on terms of close intimacy with the garret-windows, revealing endless bird's-eye views of chimney-pots, back-yards, and water-butts, and causing the passengers of reflective minds to meditate upon the accumulation of poverty and pig-sties that exist in the metropolis, unknown to the inhabitants in general, and West-enders in particular.

The progress of the train was not so rapid as might have been expected; this Mr. Barlow attributed to the use of the simple fluid in the boiler instead of gin-and-water, which, he informed a lady near him, was always laid on at fair-time. At Deptford Creek the engine stopped altogether, and remained stationary for at least ten minutes. Messrs. Mills and Saunders, having in vain attempted, by shouting and screaming, to arouse the stoker to a sense of his duty, commenced the inspiring national air of "Rule

Britannia," or rather, the words newly arranged, at the very top of their voices, in which they were joined by the whole strength of the rest of the passengers. By these means the popular indignation was audibly expressed, and the train at length moved on, arriving at the terminus at half-past nine.

Having fixed upon a stellated arrangement of variegated lights to serve as a species of pole-star, in case they should be separated by the crowd, our three companions plunged, like so many Miltons, into the midst of things. Around them was a dense mass of human beings; on either side a row of richly-furnished booths groaning with toys and gingerbread; above them, lights innumerable; beneath them, an expanse of mud and rough granite; before them, the imposing exterior of the shows; and behind them, the things they had passed. The remote thunder of trumpets and drums, mingled with the nearer harmony of Æolian pears, and the cries, laughter, and chiding of the festive throng, smote, with deafening confusion, on the ears.

Their first step was to halt at one of the stalls, where each purchased a small penny cornet without the pistons, and a curious little instrument, which it appears actually incumbent upon everybody to possess who wishes to take up an important position at Greenwich Fair. This diverting and ingenious piece of mechanism is principally formed by a stellated disc of wood, one inch in diameter by three-eighths in thickness. A small spring of wood is attached to the frame-work by a metal pin termed a tack, and as the wheel is turned by friction against any extraneous body, the spring falls from one vandyke to another, *producing, by the rapid succession of atmospheric concussion, a noise resembling the laceration of a garment.* Thus

armed, they proceeded onwards, promoting, by their musical instruments, the harmony of the delightful scene; and, after much jostling, and bandying of various complimentary expressions with the crowd, arrived in front of the principal show, which merits especial notice.

The precise date of erection of Richardson's (or more properly, Lee and Johnson's) theatre has not been correctly ascertained; but it is presumed that the first pole was pitched on the Friday night previous to the fair. It is an elegant structure of baize and canvass, brilliantly illuminated by variegated lamps and pipkins of fat, and enriched, in addition, by red serge draperies, embroidered with brass ornaments, fashioned similarly to those which cover the screws of four-post bedsteads. The performances of this theatre are strictly illegitimate, yet bear a close analogy to the "moralities" of olden time, inasmuch as the best part takes place outside of the platform of the cart; or approaching, perhaps, nearer to the "mysteries" of the middle ages, from the perfect unintelligibility of the plots, which would defy the united efforts of Mr. Payne Collier, and the whole of the Shakspeare Society, to render them comprehensible.

On ascending the platform, the three young gentlemen stopped to gaze at an intricate dance performed by the whole of the company, which they accompanied on their tumpets. At its conclusion, Mr. Mills asked the clown how it fell upon the whole?" and the clown replied by shing to know what Mr. Mills was going to stand. On ring sixpence, they were admitted to the gallery; but the accommodation of this part of the house not being to their *faction*, they at once climbed over the barrier into the

boxes, divers others of the gentlemen present following their example.

The first play occupied exactly ten minutes. It contained



one ghost, two murders, and three combats, and represented Innocence, though for a time oppressed, ultimately

triumphant over guilt; a consummation which, Mr. Barlow observed, must be highly gratifying to every well-regulated mind. The proportion of the actors to the height of the stage was exceedingly fine; so was their delivery; only equalled by the interpolations of the audience, which may be described as follows:—

SCENE—*The Hall of Judgment.*

Tyrant Lord.—Now, mitheruble athathin, what have you to thay for yourthelf?

Mr. Barlow (in the style of Herr Von Joel)—*Va-ri-e-ty!*

Oppressed peasant.—That I am innocent as the mountain-snow.

Gentleman in the gallery.—Oh! Walker!

Second Gentleman.—Order!

(*Obligato of trumpets and musical fruit by the audience.*)

Tyrant Lord.—You are guilty. Thummonth the headth-man.

Popular indignation of spectators.—Shame! shame!—*Police!*—Never mind, little un—at him agin!

Tyrant Lord.—Away! hith life ith forfeit.

Wag in the pit.—What 'll you take for your boots barring the heels?

And so on to the fall of the curtain.

A comic song served as an overture to the pantomime, which was an abridgment of “Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree,” lately performed at the Olympic Theatre. The jokes therein were two in number. One consisted in the sudden abstraction, by invisible agency, of a wickerwork plum-pudding from the hands of the Clown, who, thereupon, entitled it a *hasty-pudding*; the other, which was simply practical, in

the Clown' stealing a string of sausages, manufactured from painted canvass stuffed with sawdust, and then dashing them into the Pantaloon's face. The last scene was an adjournment to "Fairy Land," that locality being represented by the interior of a large summer-house, with the assembling of the company, and the additional presence of two young ladies in pink calico tunics, who had previously retailed peppermint and apples to the company. At the conclusion, the audience were thanked in the name of the proprietors, and then let out at a side-door, a fresh rush immediately filling the theatre.

Messrs. Saunders, Barlow, and Mills, next proceeded to view the equestrianism at the "Royal Circus." The chandelier which lighted the interior was ingeniously formed of concentric iron hoops one over the other, supporting several very adipose candles, which the Merryman occasionally snuffed with his fingers in a humorous and diverting manner. The exhibition commenced with the display of the Terpsichorean powers of a young lady on the tight rope, which stretched across the arena—a ring of sawdust, ornamented with orange-peel. She was ten years of age, and splendidly dressed in a coloured calico frock, with a faded cotton-velvet body, ornamented with lines of dull spangles and tarnished silver-lace, with whity-brown holland slippers. After this, they were gratified by the "grand *entrée* of the stud," a piebald mare, inclined to corpulency, led in by two grooms in fustian waistcoats and ankle-jacks. The young lady now danced upon horseback, assuming a graceful attitude and pleasing *stereotypical* smile. Before this act concluded, Mr. Saunders and his friends departed, perfectly satisfied with what they had seen, and also with what they *had not, but which* they could very well imagine. Here

also the Clown's jokes were of the dual number. After having chalked the slippers of the young lady, he proceeded to do the same to his own nose, and, subsequently, to the soles of his shoes, "because he had slipped into a public house the night before, and into the gutter afterwards, and did not wish to do it again." Also, when assaulted by the



Mr. Widdicomb of the ring, he hauled that person in front of the piebald steed, and then professed himself quite satisfied, having brought him before the *mare*. (The reader is here humbly solicited to laugh, merely as a personal favour.) The impression left on the minds of the young gentlemen upon leaving was, that they had enjoyed a very rational—at any rate a very reasonable—entertainment. *The price of admission, as stated outside, was sixpence to*

the boxes, and threepence to the gallery; but these distinctions proved, upon going inside, perfectly apocryphal.

The observing trio then proceeded to the next show, to view the fat pig, with other wonders, therein to be seen by all who could command one penny. They discovered the monster reclining on a bed of straw, and grunting piteously under his too, too solid fat. When the showman had violently thrust twenty people into a space capable of accommodating four or five, the keeper delivered the following lecture upon the pig, and the other curiosities which composed the exhibition. It should be stated that the man appeared to be suffering from influenza.

"Geltelbel ald ladies,

"The hadibal that you there be-old beasures tel **feet three** ilches frob the slout to the tail. The daily quality of **food** which he colsubes is wul peck of potatoes, ald wul shillil's wuth of bread. I shall low bake hib get up, ald you will thel have al opportunity hof seeil' hib to advaltage."

So saying, he stirred the monster up with a switch, to his no small annoyance. The brute, after standing in the worst possible of humours for about two minutes, began to incline itself on its right side, until, at length, having forced its bulk over the centre of gravity, it fell at full length, with a weight that threatened to bring the whole machine down.

"The hadibal," continued the keeper, "that you see suspended there, is a calf, borl with two eds ald two tails. That other curiosity, ladies and geltelbel, is called the porcupile fish, from beil covered, has you observe, all over with prickles; ald was vashed ashore ob the coast ov Buckilghabshire. Geltelbel ald ladies, a trifle, hif you please, *for the showbal.*"

Emerging from the den of this extraordinary lion (*videlicet* pig), our three adventurers, forcing their way through a crowd of living obstacles, to the provocation of remonstrances more warm than affectionate, and of salutations less polite than playful, bore—or, rather bored,—in the direction of another menagerie, of which the embellished exterior attracted their attention. The principal curiosities which the exhibition contained, appeared from the pictorial advertisement outside, to be not very dissimilar to those they had just witnessed,—one of them being, literally, a member of the *sus scrofa* family, and the other an animal in many respects closely allied to it, but, from being a biped, and having some pretensions to the feminine cast of countenance, denominated “The fat girl.”

A whole-length portrait, that graced the front of the exhibition, represented the young lady as she was supposed to appear inside. The drapery of the figure was somewhat scanty, and free from the slightest affectation of harmony in the arrangement of the colours. It was evident that the artist had sacrificed grace to effect; his object having been to afford as full a display of the unadorned beauties of the neck, arms, and ankles, as he possibly could. On the right of the corpulent fair-one (the picture was a full front) stood, arrayed in the costume of the commencement of the present century, a lady, in a short-waisted dress, with a red parasol: on the left, a gentleman in a blue coat, brass buttons, leather breeches, and top-boots; both personages in profile, and exhibiting animated gestures of astonishment. This *chef-d'œuvre* of anonymous art was flanked by two other productions, apparently by the same hand; one being a delineation of “Gorgons, Hydras, and Chimeras dire;” with other serpentine monstrosities; and, the other, the interest-

ing and learned pig, in a mystic circle of cards, letters, and points of the compass.

The students having, by the sacrifice of a small piece of money, obtained admission into the *penetralia* of the caravan,



found themselves in the presence of two or three small boys, and the sagacious animal himself; who, with the instinct peculiar to his species, was hunting for eatables all about the place, and testifying by various grunts, his dissatisfaction at not finding any. At the further end of this cabinet

of curiosities, which in length might be equalled by an ordinary man's jump, and in breadth by, perhaps, three skips of a flea of average power, was a species of *sanctum*, apparently formed of bed-furniture and fringe, and adapted, as it were, for the residence of some zoological curiosity. Presently a hand appeared, which drew the two portions together, and then the concussion, as of a heavy body relapsing into a state of quiescence, left no doubt on the minds of the spectators that the inmate of this seclusion was the fat girl. In a few minutes the show having filled to a degree that rendered it necessary to open a small trap-door in the roof, the exhibition commenced.

"Fust, gen'l'men and ladies," said the demonstrator, in that peculiar tone which frequent catarrhal diseases, and the constant use of alcoholic remedies, combine to produce,— "fust, we shall hintroduce to yer notice that wonderful nacheral curiosity of the female speech is, the fat girl. For yer satisfacshun she'll walk athert the caravan, and back agin, so as you may see there's no himposition in the case."

Herewith, the fair phenomenon, parting the curtain to the right and left, emerged from her bower, and walked twice up and down the middle of the show, endeavouring as she went to shake the frail tenement with her tread. The truth was, that the affair slightly approached to what Mr. Saunders denominated "a take in,"—Mr. Mills, "his eye," and Mr. Barlow, "a jolly sell;" all of them agreeing that they had seen several nurses who were twice as fat, but, that a certain young lady, not half her age—the fat girl was, at least, fifty,—daily on view in a particular tobacco-shop, was, certainly, twice her size. They allowed that the plume of white feathers in her hair, the bandana on

her forehead, the spangled dress, and the short sleeves and petticoats, had been correctly delineated outside the show; but that the portrait of the fat girl, on the whole, and particularly as regarded expression, was "a decided case" of flattery.



The female having retired, the other animal became the observed of all observers. He performed three feats, each requiring (for a pig) an amazing exertion of intellect. He was first desired by his master to declare which among the male individuals present might be at that present moment *in love*, by stopping opposite to him in his circuit. Mr.

Saunders denominated this performance "a jib," as he stopped before a little boy of six years' old, who was munching an apple, which had probably attracted him. A kick in the stomach, administered by his master, recalled him to a sense of his obligations, and he straightway pitched upon Mr. Barlow, at which three young ladies in the show laughed amazingly. His next task was to point out the young woman present whom the tender passion deprived of rest at night, and caused, by the febrile excitement which it induced, to kick off the superincumbent drapery. This he achieved so well as to excite universal applause; and, as the damsel indicated was about twenty, it is probable, on statistical grounds, that he was right. And, lastly, he was desired to tell who was the greatest rogue in the company; and decided in favour of his master—a conclusion which nobody doubted.

After the hierophant of the caravan had exhibited some snakes, he thanked the audience; and the illustrious triad bent their steps towards the point, *par excellence*, of attraction—the Crown and Anchor Booth. To render the company of this establishment slightly exclusive and select, the sum of one shilling was demanded for entrance. Messrs. Saunders and Barlow, by means of recommendations, in the shape of return-tickets, which they obtained from two of its lady-patronesses, who were taking their leave for the evening, effected their entrance without paying; as, also, did Mr. Mills, who stooped down, and butted, head first, through the crowd at the wicket.

In order to adequately describe the scene presented by the interior of this splendid booth, or the feelings which it excited, no pen less gifted than that of the talented auctioneer, who can raise even rubbish to rarities, could

aspire. All was music, light, and tobacco ; and the crowd, but for the hilarity which pervaded it, would have been awful. Stars, festoons, balloons, Vs and As, crowns, and other fanciful arrangements of variegated lamps depended from the ceiling, producing a singular empyreumatic odour, —strong, certainly, yet to those who liked it, pleasant. On a raised and curiously-unsafe platform were seated some musicians of untiring energy ; and several hundred couples were performing the Spanish dance below. The dancers were mostly of opposite sexes ; but, amongst them were several individuals of that class of society so well known as “gents,” who, out of sheer devotion to Bacchus and Terpsichore, were exhibiting the poetry of motion in partnership. Two of these “gents,” impinging somewhat violently against Mr. Saunders, he was about to perform an operation on them, which Dr. Conquest has tried for water on the brain, *viz.* “punching the head,” and was only deterred by the thought that black eyes look rakish at *demonstration* in the morning.

Our friends, now making the circuit of this scene of innocent festivity, joined a procession of bacchanals, male and female, headed by a Comus in cloth boots and a fifteen-shilling Taglioni, and parading, after the manner of the ancients, to the sound of musical instruments—trumpets, whistles, horns, and drums. As the procession generally chose for its line the centre of the Spanish dance whilst it was in full play, many serious concussions took place ; so, fearing an *émeute*, the trio left the jovial band, and wandered awhile “at their own sweet will,” among the crowd, *interchanging greetings with some whom they knew, and with a great many more whom they knew not.* At last, pronouncing the atmosphere too full of carbonic acid for wholesome

respiration; or, as Mr. Barlow said, "so full of smoke, that he should cut it;" and somewhat inclining to the celebrated "hospital Medoc," commonly known as "half-and-half," they determined to leave the booth. Both, not exactly approving of the exclusive principle on which the arrangements were conducted, they took checks, and gave them to the most disreputable persons they could find.

As they returned into town they observed an erection, which reminded them of the pictures of Noah's ark. It was nearly sixty feet long, and contained, they were informed, a live whale. Agreeing that whatever was to be seen there was, no doubt, very like one, they proceeded, without entering, on their way; and happening to see some shrimps, invitingly displayed in a window, amongst other luxuries, they rushed upstairs, guided by a board in the shop, on which was inscribed "Supper Rooms," and entered the first-floor front. They were rather dismayed at finding they had entered a temperance coffee-house, where nothing was kept but coffee and ginger-beer; but, having prevailed upon the landlady to send out for two pots of the favourite beverage, they ordered some of the aforesaid *crustacea*, and commenced a bacchanalian song, in which Mr. Barlow accused himself of having forsaken an imaginary young lady, named Phillis, to whom he was supposed to be paying his addresses, and stuck to his glass; ending with an enumeration of the comforts found in wine.

When this had concluded, to the great joy of the assembled teetotallers, Mr. Mills got out of the window upon the ledge of the shop-front, and amused himself by addressing the crowd on the subject of the income-tax, strangely mixed it up with divers snatches of anatomy and popular *metaphysics*. His harangue was received with loud shouts.

and showers of orange-peel ; but fearing lest two or three policemen should be added to the number of his hearers, and finding that the shrimps and half-and-half had arrived, after a few minutes' oratory, the honourable gentleman sat down—to supper.

The social meal having been despatched, our three adventurers returned to town. They went back as they came—by the train ; and yelled, shouted, and screamed, with all their might, to the apparent delight of the generality of their fellow-passengers ; but to the scandalization of a small minority, in the person of a serious-looking young man, who inquired whether they considered themselves gentlemen ; to which question they replied, that they certainly did not,—thus stopping all further argument.

We will not follow their revelries further, It will suffice to say that, on returning to their respective lodgings—at what precise time is not known, but it is presumed to have been at a very early hour,—each, as he laid his head upon his pillow, exulted in that delightful consciousness, which it is the exclusive privilege of the aspiring mind to feel, of having “ done it rather.”

AN ENGLISH MASQUERADE.

THERE are many dreary things in the world besides death, debtors' prisons, and theatres by daylight. A "genteel" dinner-party of rural aristocracy is amazingly slow, and so is a wet Sunday at Worthing. The same pantomime seen half-a-dozen times has a dispiriting effect ; and certain dull debates in the Houses of Parliament incite the belief that the members' skulls are as somniferous and hollow as dried poppy-heads. The archives of Exeter Hall, doubtless, contain a very shady chronicle of not over-lively events. Solitary men, in new lodgings, feel exquisitely cheerless ; and the Red House at Battersea, in the middle of January, ceases to impart anything like hilarity to our feelings.

But the saddest concern of all,—the ghost of fun decked in the worn-out trappings of happiness,—a gilt skeleton adorned with wreaths of artificial flowers,—a hearse hung round with illumination lamps,—is a masquerade in England.

Whether it be that the open disposition of the natural character unfits us for assuming the mask with becoming spirit, or whether in reality our wit is too ponderous to flash about these entertainments as it ought to do, we leave others to determine ; but, certain it is, that every *successful attempt to establish a masquerade as one of our regular amusements, proves more and more how utterly incapable*

we are of entering into its humour, in respect to other European nations ; and we affirm this advisedly, for we have had many opportunities of drawing the comparison. We have been deluded into the Tarantella at Naples by a pair of large black eyes, whose glances implied much more, even through the peep-holes of a mask, than those of a colder clime could express with the assistance of the whole face ; and we have fallen quite as deeply in love with a round, dimpled chin, short upper lip, and row of dazzling pearly teeth, shrouded by the black fringe of the vizard, as with the whole *contour* of some other lovely countenance ; for your mask is a great auxiliary to female attractions ; it heightens beauty by half concealing it ; and, *vice versâ*, it covers all defects. We have, also,

“ Some weeks before Shrove-Tuesday comes about,”

lounged as a modern Greek, in the full blaze of day, at the *cafés* in the Piazza St. Marco at Venice ; or haply toiled up the inclined planes of the Campanile to shower chocolate *bonbons* from the summit upon the crowd below ; and, though last, not least in our memory, we have, in our capacity of a student of the Quartier Latin, worn a *debardeur's* dress for a whole week together, and whirled and galloped to the music of Musard and Magnus in the *salle* of the Rue Vivienne, or the more boisterous assembly of the Prado, until the busy *chiffonniers* had been about some time before we wandered back to our abode on a *sixième* in the Rue St. Jacques. Nay, even this conclusion to a night's revelry has been sometimes denied ; for, with the candour of Rousseau, we admit that we have sometimes passed the night in the violon below the staircase of the Opera Comique, and appeared before the police the next morning in our

glazed hat, blue shirt, and black velvet trowsers, to make what excuse we best might for having, under the very shadow of the *garde municipale*, with their tiger-skin helmets, given ourselves up, "*un p'tit peu trop fort*," to the *abandon* of the dance, in defiance of the placard which informed us that our style was "*défendu par les autorités*." Should you wish the scene brought pictorially before your eyes, we unhesitatingly refer you to the vivid sketches of our friend Gavarni.

Strange to say, we had never seen a masquerade in England,—principally, we believe, on account of the price of admission having been generally fixed at a sum which, if expended, would swamp all hopes of dinner for the next fortnight to a scribbler of the present day. We "assisted," (as they say abroad,) it is true, at the *bal masqué* given by Jullien at Drury Lane; but this was a very dull affair, although hundreds had paid their guinea for admission,—an expenditure which we confess to have avoided, now it is all past, by going as a mere spectator to the dress-circle, and jumping down into the arena during a *galoppe monstre*, when the policeman in attendance had been violently carried off by sundry couples in the general whirl.

Curiosity to see how a masquerade would be conducted in England, and the present of a ticket, were the exciting causes of the visit we paid a short time since to Vauxhall. It was with much satisfaction we read an announcement that the gardens were to open once again. We had not quite forgotten the excitement of the first time we went there; we are afraid to say how long back, but it was at the time when "Mother Town" dispensed coffee and rolls to the boys of Merchant-Tailors' School, the constant use of which milk-diet did not prevent us on this event from

getting slightly elevated, and performing an *impromptu pas-de-deux* with one of the red-coated waiters in front of the supper-box. We still think that, not being accustomed to them, it must have been the profusion of lamps which upset our stomach, for anatomy has since taught us the intimate connexion between that organ and the eyes. Our friends hold a different opinion, and incline to the belief that it was the "rack punch," a beverage well named, indeed, if the state of the head the next day be taken into consideration.

We were much grieved when we were informed last year that Vauxhall was about to close for ever ! We could not believe that any one would ever have the hardihood to take down or remove those gaudy emblems that had whilom so much bewildered us,—the balloon going up with flags and crowns,—the stars, mottoes, and devices. The orchestra, too, was to be razed to the ground,—that illuminated pepper-box from which we had heard so many diverting songs, when the musicians played in all the glory of their cocked hats ; and the gentleman in white kids, whom nobody knew, led forth the lady, whom everybody knew, to sing, in a grand black velvet hat adorned with feathers from a cock's tail turned downwards, and trimmed apparently with bits of black tobacco-pipe, French-polished. And they coolly talked of building houses—common, uninteresting houses!—on the very ground that the rockets had gone up from, and, occasionally, come down again through the sky-lights of the neighbouring dwellings, bursting and shedding their coloured stars upon the staircases in a most *diverting manner*, and allowing the inhabitants a private *exhibition to themselves*. The whole speculation was wild and impossible. We are convinced, had the houses been

built and taken on lease, that the immortal Simpson, angered at the profanation, would have come back from the shades, and called around him all the spirits who shed lustre over Vauxhall in former times, to aid him in perpetually ringing the bells, and making strange noises, after the fashion of haunted houses, upon the authorities of Glanville and Aubrey, until the dwellers therein gave warning and fled away, leaving the elevations to keep standing alone, or tumble down by degrees, as they best might.

Mais revenons à nos moutons, which, being an entirely novel phrase, never before made use of, we may as well explain to signify that we got a ticket for the masquerade, and intended to go. The choice of a costume for a time somewhat perplexed us; until, having inquired the price of hire, and inspected every dress in Nathan's wardrobes, from the habit of the field-officer at fifteen shillings, to the Albanian pirate at three guineas, we finally decided upon arraying ourselves as "a gent. of the nineteenth century;" and therefore, when the eventful evening arrived, we arrayed ourselves in one of the fashionable five-and-twenty-shilling-union-workhouse Taglionis now so popular, and a long bright blue satin stock, worked with gold flies and forget-me-nots, which was fastened by a massy pin, representing a gilt lobworm twirling round a large white currant, connected by a small jack-chain to another jewel, which had the appearance of a bird's egg set in a miniature-frame. We also turned up our wristbands over our cuffs, and wore our hat on one side; and, having received the complimentary assurance of an esteemed friend that we looked "a thorough snob," we set off towards our destination about half-past eleven at night.

As we passed through Westminster some cabs rattled by, containing ladies and gentlemen, more or less disguised ; but the first real evidence of the night's entertainment was presented at Vauxhall Bridge, where we saw a brigand in a magnificent dress of green baize, trimmed with pewter watches, calmly waiting at the toll-house for five-penny worth of coppers in change. His companion—they were both walking—had assumed the dress of an English peasant, in a smock-frock, and navigator's hat ; and his appearance was much heightened by a large artificial nose, to which a pair of frizzly mustachios was attached. Their noble bearing did not appear to awe the toll-keeper in any way : on the contrary, he betrayed little courtesy towards them, and returned a sullen grunt only to a joke from the robber, who requested “ he would bring out his scales, because he thought one of the halfpence was under weight.”

A large crowd had assembled at the doors of the gardens, who received each fresh costume with enthusiastic cheers, and many humorous allusions to the characters assumed. The quiet aspect of our own dress saved us from any of these salutations ; and passing through the Cimmerian glimmer of the entrance, we emerged from its gloom into the scene of festivity. The majority of the company were viewing the fireworks then exhibiting ; but as we had no great desire to see what we had so often witnessed before, and which always appeared the same, except that the squibs were sometimes fixed in the middle of the frames, and the wheels outside, instead of the inverse arrangement, we remained in the promenade, perfectly contented with *hearing the distant sounds of admiration at the exploding rockets, which diverting practice has lived longer than any custom we can call to mind.*

With the concluding bang of the last *bouquet*, the company returned to the illuminated portion of the gardens, and a motley tribe they appeared. There were certainly amongst them persons of rare and undoubted talent, who assumed the dress and manners of the lower classes with such exquisite truth, that you could hardly believe they had paid their half-guinea for admittance. Two young ladies, dressed as mountain sylphs, considerably enlivened the scene by the fay-like manner in which they occasionally put their feet on the shoulders of different individuals that passed; and a gentleman in an apron, with a long broom and a red nose, created much mirth by sweeping dust over everybody that came near him, especially annoying a knight in scale armour, who maintained a most lachrymose gravity of countenance all the evening, and fainting under the weight of his harness, looked as if he would have given the world for a pint of beer. A group of young ladies, also, in pinafores and pink sashes, with hoops and skipping-ropes, gave an air of innocence and childlike revelry to the *réunion*. We gazed at them with unfeigned interest, and moralising even in the midst of masquerade, inwardly hoped that their hearts might ever be as pure and guileless as they then seemed,—a wish which towards the end of the evening we certainly did not think appeared likely to be realised, when their merriment became rather Anacreontic than infantile.

As far as eating and drinking went, it is but justice to say, that every one performed admirably, but we observed that, with the generality of the parties, jugs of stout and dishes of cold beef had the preference in point of popularity over champagne and cold fowls. But the end was answered *just the same*, for it had the effect of making the company

exceedingly bacchanalian after supper, when their wit broke into full play. We perceived that the most favourite humour consisted in running very fast along the walks, and yelling loudly,—certainly a facetious performance; and it was esteemed an excellent conceit to bolt through the middle of the quadrilles which were being perpetrated beneath the orchestra, and jostle the dancers one over the other.

It was evident that assumption of character was never once thought about. The only instance we remarked occurred whilst we were discussing some cold ham, when a young gentleman, habited as Jack Sheppard, walked into our box, and presenting a sixpenny pistol, shot a pea in our face, and then walked out again: and—*à propos des bottes*—there are many legends told of the filmy slices of ham at Vauxhall, which ought to be refuted. We never saw any that were cut much under the thickness of ordinary slices, so think, like many other popular errors, the tradition lives upon its former credit.

It will scarcely be credited that in the midst of all this gaiety we more than once caught ourselves yawning. Yet so it was; and only the wish to see if the mirth would take another turn, induced us to remain after a certain period. At last, even the vivacity of a recruiting-party, who beat drums uninterruptedly the whole evening; and the vocalisation of a ballad-singer, whose lungs would have worked a blast-furnace, and the elegant evolutions of several energetic gentlemen who were waltzing together to the band under the front walk, ceased to amuse us. The grey light of morning was stealing over the gardens, putting to shame the few glimmering lamps that flickered on the motto.

"VIVE LE MASQUE," now rapidly decaying; the chirp of two or three daring sparrows, accustomed to early rising, had supplanted the imitations of Herr Von Joel; and the spire of the Hamburgh church was once more vividly thrown out in the "natural light" when we left the gardens, most grateful with ourselves for having been to a masquerade, on the same principle that we thank a man, who, wearing a bad coat, tells us the address of his tailor.



A LITTLE TALK ABOUT SCIENCE AND THE SHOW-FOLKS.

WE are, certainly, getting too refined to be jovial ; and our increased education is gradually driving out of our hearts what little inclination to honest mirth the altered times have left us. All the sports that made old England " merrie " at that jocund period " once upon a time " are disappearing one by one ; and Science has so startled our ancient pastimes, that few have had the good fortune to withstand her march, and assert their ancient powers of attraction for the citizens of London. Nor will they ever rise again ; or, if they do, their re-appearance will be in some altered and deeply philosophical form ; so that honest old Strutt himself would not recognise those games, whose principles and laws he has so fondly collected and chronicled. The turf of the tilt-yard would be supplanted by wooden blocks and asphalte ; the boats of the players at the water-quintain would be propelled by the Archimedes screw, instead of the lusty arms of " the youthe of Finsburie and Chepe : " the marching watch of St. John's Eve in their bright armour, and with their blazing cressets, would give place to a procession of policemen in India-rubber cloaks, bearing a dazzling and bewildering galaxy of Bude lights : *the Yule-log of Christmas* would yield to a lump of anthracite coal in a Dr. Arnott's stove, or a Chunk, or a Harper and Joyce, or a Vesta, or some other uncomfortable-looking,

black, cheerless substitute for a proper grate fire, of which every one knows half the pleasure is to look at and poke : the simple feats of the gleemen and joculators would be eclipsed by the more astounding illusions of Mr. Bachhoffner at the Polytechnic Institution : the garlands would revolve round the Maypole by voltaic electricity ; and the "miracles, mysteries, and moralities" performed on carts during the season of Lent, would be supplanted by travelling lectures from scientific institutions, in perambulating vans driven by steam, or raised gently from one spot to another by numerous balloons guided by Mr. Green's whirling-gigs.

We assert, firmly and deliberately, all these things would happen—nay, they will happen ; and we are not far from the period of the crisis. The time is fast approaching when our very nurseries will be the schools for science ; when our children's first books will be treatises on deeply scientific subjects ; and when even their playthings will partake of the change. The Dutch toys will be thrown aside for the Daguerreotype ; the doll's house will be a model of the Adelaide Gallery ; and the nursery carpets and morning dresses will be burnt full of holes by the acid from the doll's galvanic trough or hydrogen apparatus. Cheap air-pumps will be imported from Holland in chip boxes, with barrels fitted up on the principle of the pop-gun ; and dumps will be no longer cast in pipeclay moulds, but turned out fresh and sharp by the electrotype—another type of the advancing age. Noah's arks will assume the form of chemical-experiment boxes : the beasts and birds will turn to rows of labelled reagents, and Noah and his family, *sticks, little round hats and all*, will be transformed into *test-tubes and spirit lamps*. The magic-lantern will be cast

aside for the gas microscope; and our old and once-loved friends, the devil and the baker, the tiger that rolls his eyes, and the birds that fly out of the pie, will at last vanish away to nothing in reality, before the magnified attractions of the claws of the *Dytiscus Marginalis*, the wing of the *Libellula*, or the wriggling abominations of a drop of dirty water; of which horrors, collected from standing pools and crammed into the smallest possible quantity of fluid that will allow them room to move, people go away from the exhibition firmly convinced that they allow millions to pass down their *œsophagus* (it used to be called gullet) every time they take a draught of water, and they abandon it in consequence, and stick to Guinness and Whitbread. We do not think that any microscopic exhibitor has yet been rash enough to show what species of monstrous animalculæ is found in a pot of stout or "half-and-half."

Amongst the changes and innovations made by what the advocates of education are pleased to call "an improved state of the mental condition of the people," we regret none more than that which has led to the gradual extinction of our ancient friends, the Mountebank. We do not mean the peripatetic vendors of quack medicines—they had passed away long before we made our first *début* upon the stage of the minor theatre of our existence; but we allude to the equestrian performers, who formerly pitched their ring, and delighted us for a summer's afternoon with their wonderful feats, on some waste piece of ground in our village. Alas! the waste pieces of ground are no longer to be discovered, for they have been enclosed and built upon; and cottages, teeming with dirty squalid children have supplanted the glittering troop that were accustomed to perform their *manceuvres* on the same spot.

We well recollect the site of their most favourite *al fresco* theatre, when they paid us a visit. It was a smooth patch of grass, at the end of the village, surrounded by goodly horse-chestnut trees, that formed a pleasant shade from the sun, except where his beams fell in playful and quivering patches upon the arena. Part of this spot was bounded by one of our old abbey walls, and here was the gallery. How lucky did we think ourselves if we could procure a place on this favoured elevation, after clambering up the loose stones and rugged ivy that clung to it, and seat ourselves amidst the crowd of dirty little street boys who swarmed on its summit ! And, how well we were enabled to see the performance, without being expected to give anything ! We have never felt the same pleasure since ; not even in the curtained pigeon-holes of the Opera, or the private boxes of the great theatres. We enjoyed a faint reminiscence of bygone times one night in the gallery at Astley's, but this was far from our former sensations ; for the tawdry ceiling was above us instead of the clear blue summer sky ; the escaping gas supplied the place of the sweet country air, and the chirping of the birds in the old chestnut trees was but ill supplied by the occasional catcall of some restless spectator, impatient for the commencement of even an Astley orchestra.

To our juvenile minds the Mountebanks were beings of an elevated and barely comprehensible station. We knew them to be mortal, for they drank beer from pewter pots during the performances, and put on old great coats, which, tattered and buttonless, certainly partook of our own world, —after any very violent exertions. But then the merryman beat all our most acute conjectures as to his existence. *Could he ever have been a baby ?* We thought not, but

rather inclined to the idea that he was some wonderful creation that had dropped ready-made from the clouds,



always happy and laughing, and possessing the mysterious

power of throwing the same spell over his auditors. An ignorant companion once attempted to make us believe that a sallow-faced and melancholy-looking man whom he saw buying a loaf and a red herring in a chandler's shop the day



after one of the performances was the clown; but we did not credit his statement for an instant. No, no—the merry-man would not have bought anything. He would have gone boldly into the shop, (probably he would have jumped through the door,) and having thrust a butter-firkin on the head of the man who kept it, would have filled his pockets with what he wanted, and then driven them off on a truck of his own impromptu construction, with a fitch of bacon for the body, and cheeses for wheels. We were *half convinced* that his life was a species of perpetual panto-

mime ; that he threw somersets into bed when he retired for the night, if, indeed, he ever slept ; and that he rolled out in the morning with his head between his heels, crowing and laughing as we loved to hear him. The performances usually concluded by a lottery, which was conducted by the master of the ring, and to which a chance of participating in its prizes was obtained by the purchase of shilling tickets. Great inducements were held out to entice the rustics to risk their coin in the venture. A leg of mutton, a small pig—nay, a watch, was sometimes the chief prize ; but we noticed that, somewhat singularly, these valuable articles were always gained by some stranger whom nobody knew. No suspicion was, however, excited, and we were perfectly content with the metal pencilcase, the painted tin waiter, or the pair of snuffers, with which the blind goddess favoured us.

If a fair passed over without being attended by a show of any kind, it was a matter of deep concern to us. We believed that the economy of our village must be at a low ebb, and that the agricultural transactions connected with our annual festival could not be carried on with their usual spirit and business, unless a few sights were exhibited, in order to draw the neighbouring people together for the day. And how we used to look out for the shows the night before the fair ! With what joy we received the intelligence that the postman had passed six caravans in the lane between our village and the next town ; and with what mysterious importance we communicated the intelligence to our companions ! And when they arrived, how we watched *their heavy yellow* carriages drag up the street, one after *another*, each drawn by one miserable horse, looking like

industrious flea in the omnibus, compared to the size of vehicle ; with the sometimes additional help of a donkey yoked by old cord to the shafts ! We formed a thousand guesses as to their contents, until a strange howl from the interior of one of them betrayed the secret that they were wild beasts." From that moment there was good-b'ye to being like staying in-doors. It was no use sending the grooms after us, for we eluded their grasp by creeping under the wheels or behind the caravans ; and we watched, with the most intense interest, the gradual placing of the carriages, to form the quadrangle that was to constitute the show of to-morrow.

"dancing show" was, however, our greatest delight ; hour after hour have we loitered about the progressive erection of the spars and canvas, until the complete pavilion stood before us. How happy we thought ourselves in being able to pick up the hammer when it fell, and give it to the man on the rickety blue ladder, who was nailing to the front poles a beautiful piece of red festoon, edged with black, and adorned with round ornaments of thin brass, like escutcheons of bed-posts ! Could it be possible that the dirty people in shirt-sleeves, who were drawing out the long poles from their flat wagon, were the same who would appear on its platform the next day, in flesh-coloured breeches and velvet jackets ? Was it really the case that the man in the dingy common shawl, and without a bonnet, coming from the baker's with a stale half-quartern under his arm, would dance outside to-morrow in spangled tights and satin shoes ?—(pipe-clayed, to be sure, but still so). It was possible, we knew, and yet we scarcely realised it.

It was not until towards the afternoon of our fair that the exhibitions commenced. During the earlier part of the day the show assumed an air of impressive solemnity in its deserted loneliness, with its gaudy draperies moving gravely in the wind. No one was, as yet, on its platform; a boy occasionally crossed the arena with a beer-can; but that was all. There was no further notification of its internal existence; but we knew the preparations must be extensive and important. At last, afternoon came, and with it the show-folks, one after another, up the steps to the front platform. Then we were in our glory; an irresistible attraction bound us to the spot, and all else was forgotten. In vain did the nursery-dinner wait; we had no hunger beyond that which a penny slice of cold plum-pudding, or a mealy-looking pie, could appease; and, hidden by the crowd, we enjoyed the varying performance, hour after hour, sorry when the ominous, "All in to commence" took the actors, for a while, from our delighted gaze. There was a wild Indian, with a red-ochre face and black legs; a great curtain-ring in his nose, a large club, and a feather cap, like the penny portraits of Mr. H. Wallack, as Rolla, with all his limbs extended, holding a frightened doll on his left shoulder. There was also a countryman, with a great nose-gay and striped blue stockings, who was perpetually getting knocked down, and whose appellation appeared to be "Cauliflower;" with three gentlemen, in fancy dresses of every costume on the face of the globe, most ingeniously combined; who waltzed with the three beautiful ladies, *except when the music stopped, and then the ladies walked arm-in-arm by themselves, up and down the platform; and Mr. Merryman—dear, foolish, ill-used Mr. Merryman—led*

the master of the concern, a very fat man, in feathers and a red sash, to the front, and commenced haranguing the crowd after his master's dictation. What roars of laughter arose when he called exhibition *eggs and bacon*, and sport and pastime *pork and parsnips*; and how we wondered if it hurt him when he was whipped. Oh! how delightful it all was!

The interior of the show was equally gratifying. We were told that the outside was always the best; it might have been, but there was a great deal in paying to see the performance, whereas the other was gratis. We well remember its rough benches, formed of planks laid upon tubs; its tottering steps that conducted to the front seats, its hoops of candles, its pole that intercepted the view in the middle; and its coarsely-painted scenery—then far beyond the choicest of Stanfield's dioramas, as specimens of art, at least to our eyes. Sometimes the performance was conjuring; and sometimes it was a play, with a comic song between (sung by the countryman) whose chorus was always "Ri tit fol iddledy, tit fol iddledy, tiddledy heigh gee boo;" or, occasionally, a young lady danced a hornpipe on a little piece of board, laid down for the purpose, after which she made a collection of pence; the Pantaloon, who played the drum and pandæan pipes, informing the company, "it was all she had for her own perquisite to buy trinkets with;" the said "trinkets" meaning bread and cheese, and yellow soap. Commonplace and spiritless the performance doubtless was, but it was sufficiently attractive to make us keenly regret when it was over. We could scarcely conceive that the ground where such feats took place was part of our common market-place; and yet, there

stood the old post in a corner of the show, that we knew so well ; and long after the exhibition had departed we could trace the sawdust parallelogram that marked its former site, as we stood with much gratification on the spot which we knew had formed the mysterious *coulisses*.

The minor shows, of dwarfs, and giants, and white-haired Negresses, were also very engaging ; although they had not the imposing air of the dancing shows. Their pictures were, however, sufficiently wonderful ; and we were often disappointed at not finding the Turks and officers, and gentlemen and ladies, inside the caravan, who were painted outside as spectators of the exhibition. How we speculated as to the nature of the curiosities which the chintz drapery, stretched across the end of the show, veiled from our view ! How portably, also, were the domestic interiors of these moving houses arranged ! The small brass fire-place in the corner, that always smoked ; the seats round the sides, formed of lockers ; the trap-door in the roof, to admit air, or rather, we should say, to let it out : and the two windows with the gaudy shutters. Our chief desire, at that time, would have been to have lived in one of those perambulating residences, and travelled about wherever we liked.

Even the humble peep-shows were not without enjoying a share of our patronage ; and we listened with the most juvenile credulity to the exhibitor's descriptions, as we stood behind the green-baize curtain, on the little low form that raised our eyes to a level with the wondrous lenses. At the time we write of, Mr. Weare's murder furnished abundant material for these migrating dioramas ; and we perfectly recollect the series of peep-show views that the event gave birth to. The murder in Gill's-hill-lane : the

pond at Elstree, where the body was found; the stable-yard of Probert's cottage; and the interior of the Crown court at Hertford; were all vividly impressed on our imagination; and even now we can picture them as if we had but seen them yesterday.

When the Mountebanks disappeared our greatest juvenile pleasure went with them. For months afterwards we looked with no common interest and veneration upon the scene of their performances, where the horses' feet had cut up a circle on the turf, and the holes in the ground which the stakes had made that enclosed the ring, seemed the links which bound us to our former pleasures.

At length, a summer passed away and the Mountebanks came not. We never saw them again. We thought we once recognised the merryman at Hampton races, and we grieved that he had descended to what we deemed the illegitimate drama. The piece of ground was dug and planted with potatoes; subsequently it became a timber-yard where the very trees were cut up that formerly, enclosed it; and there is now some talk in our parish of purchasing the lease of the ground and erecting a Literary and Scientific Institution thereon by subscription, to distribute philosophical knowledge amongst the inhabitants of the village at a cheap rate, and to form a class for acquiring a perfect understanding of the properties of polarized light, crystallography, and the condensation of carbonic acid gas.

Increasing years have changed our disposition, and shows and mountebanks have now lost their attractions. The *joyous medium* of childhood, through which we viewed *their motley wonders*, has been drawn aside, and we can

only now look on them in the most literal and commonplace sense. Still, for the sake of old association, we sometimes pay a visit to them ; and if a laugh is provoked by some absurdity that would formerly have excited astonishment ; if we see, in the little people around us, something of the same delight which we once cordially entered into, surely our end is more than answered.



A LITTLE TALK ABOUT BARTHOLOMEW FAIR— PAST AND PRESENT.

By the time this sheet is in the hands of the reader, Bartholomew Fair will be spoken of as a festival that once was—an annual celebration, the account of which must henceforward be added, in the shape of an appendix, to the succeeding editions of Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes." For a long period its health has been visibly declining, from the effects of a shattered and depraved constitution. The same year that beheld the abolition of the climbing-boys—who whilome peopled the locality whereon it was held, for their yearly banquet, when the kind-hearted Charles Lamb felt it no degradation to sup with them,—has also witnessed the extinction of the *fête*, to celebrate whose return the "clergy imps" assembled amongst the cattle-pens, then and there to discuss the hissing sausages and small ale, which benevolence had provided for them.

Certainly better times and places for reflection might be found in London than Smithfield on a fair-day: and yet, we confess to have fallen into a day-dream on the fifth of the past month, when we paid what will probably be our last visit to this departed festival. We are indebted for our vision to no romance of poetic situation. We were sitting on the handle of a gaudily-painted hand-cart containing *penny ginger-beer*, by the side of a small perambulating theatre, which set forth "the vicissitudes of a servant-

maid ;" and, in spite of the unceasing noise on every side, we could not desist from indulging in a mental Daguerreo-type of events connected with the fair and its localities.

We first called to mind the period when Smithfield was "a plain, or smoothe field," from which circumstance, according to old Fitzstephen, it derived its name ; and when, instead of the London butchers and country drovers, a gay train of gallant knights and tramping men-at-arms, whose harness gleamed in the sunlight of the glittering lists, together with a bevy of smiling, fair-haired "damosels" on their ambling palfreys, rode over its unpaved area to join the tournaments there held. We pictured them coming by "Gilt-spurre, or Knight-rider Street,—so called because of the knights, who in quality of their honour wore gilt spurs, and who, with others, rode that way to the joustings and other feats of arms used in Smithfield." And then we thought what a fortune the events of these times would have been to the *boudoir* romancists of the present day, who write such pretty stories with dove's quills and otto of roses, for the annuals. Next we lost ourselves in a reverie about the sly Rahere,—the founder of the monastery and fair, and minstrel to Henry the First,—who was in former days employed to tell stories to royalty (an office, it would seem, not altogether obsolete), and who once began one of so great a length that he himself fell asleep in the middle, and never finished it. Rahere, when he was sick, was frightened into this pious act by a supposed visitation of St. Bartholomew, and became the first head of the priory, within whose walls the drapers and clothiers invited to the fair were *allowed to lock up their wares every night. Anon we allowed ourselves to be carried in dreamy listlessness along the stream of time, until we were again halting, as we*

chuckled at the recollection of the humorous doings in the fair in the days of "Rare Ben Jonson,"—the puppet motions of Hero and Leander, altered from Sestos and Abydos to Puddledock and Bankside,—the Bartholomew pig, "roasted with fire o' juniper and rosemary branches,"—the court of *pié-poudre*, the "well-educated ape," and the "hare that beat the tabor,"—all hackneyed subjects to mouldy antiquaries, we allow; but, not being over-addicted to rummaging dusty records and worm-eaten volumes, still interesting to common-place every-day people like ourselves. And lastly, we pictured the fair as we had known it in our own days, of which poor Hone has left us so lively a specimen, and calling back some of the scenes we had therein witnessed, we began to think that the abolition was not altogether useless or disadvantageous.

Whether our reflections would now have taken a retrograde turn, and wandered back again to the days of the tournaments, we know not; but, having arrived close upon the present period, we were somewhat startled, upon wishing to use it, to find that our handkerchief had disappeared whilst we had been lost in our reveries; and, possibly, was already fluttering before one of the neighbouring bandana-bazaars in Field-lane. Hereupon we determined to give up ruminating in Smithfield, leaving that process to those animals in the cattle-market whose peculiar nature it is so to do; and having risen from our seat, and thanked the ginger-beer man for the accommodation his wagon afforded, we commenced making the tour of the fair, or rather, the ground once allotted to it.

There were no shows—no huge yellow caravans, or canvas pavilions, covered with wondrous representations of the marvels to be seen within; a few small portable theatres

formed the leading exhibitions. One there was, to be sure, of higher pretensions, into which, upon payment of one penny, we were permitted to enter. The proprietor of the spectacle, who had pitched his theatre in the back-parlour of one of the houses near the Hospital-gate, stood at the street-door, and informed us that the entertainment set forth "The Bay of Naples in its native grandeur with the percession of the Ingian monarch and his elephant,—the sportsman and the stag as walked like life—the wild duck and the water-spanell, with the burning of Hamburg."

Here was enough to see, so we entered forthwith, and wedged ourselves in the corner of a room, small, and unpleasantly warm, where an audience of some five-and-twenty had already assembled before a small proscenium, about twelve feet high, having a painted drop-scene, which represented, as nearly as we could make out the localities, the Castle of Chillon moved to Virginia Water, with Athens and Mont Blanc in the background. After an Italian boy, who with his piano-organ formed the orchestra, had played "The days when we went gipsying," the drop rose, and discovered the Bay of Naples, with surrounding buildings, and something of a conical shape painted on the back scene—the *flat* we think it is technically called—which we imagined to be a light-blue cotton nightcap, with a long tassel, until informed that it depicted "Vesuvius—the burnin' mounting, as it appears from the sea-shore." When the excitement caused by the rising of the curtain had somewhat subsided, a little figure dressed like a Turk, shuffled rapidly across the front of the stage, moving his legs backwards and forwards, both at once, and evidently by means of a crank connected with the wheels he ran on, which were invisible to the audience. Next the "percession" com-

menced, which was extremely imposing, and would have been much more so if the manager had been less hasty in taking the figures off, and putting them on other stands to go across again, which gave them the appearance of being most unsteadily intoxicated upon their second *entrée*. Then a little man came on in a boat, and shot a duck, which the "spanell" swam after; and, finally, the ignition of some red fire at the foot of Vesuvius formed the burning of Hamburg, which conflagration was exceedingly advantageous in rapidly clearing the room of the audience, by reason of its sulphureous vapour.

The principal traffic of the fair, beyond the business transacted in gingerbread-husbands, and wax-dolls from fourpence to three shillings each, was monopolised by several men in tilted carts, who were haranguing little mobs of people, and apparently disposing of their wares as fast as they could put them up for sale.

There were such frequent bursts of laughter from the buyers, that we were attracted towards one of these perambulating bazaars, in the hope of participating in their merriment. The proprietor of the cart was a tall burly fellow, in a round hat and knee-breeches, something like an aristocratic railway navigator, and the cart, in front of which he stood, was covered all over with a most curious display of goods, guns, braces, gimlets, waistcoats, saws, cruets,—in fact, specimens of almost everything ever manufactured. The man was selling the goods by his own auction, and had a flow of ready low wit,—pure, unadulterated chaff—which was most remarkable. We recollect a few of his jokes, and these we chronicle to show the style of his address, even at the risk of being again accused of "*exhibiting the coarsest peculiarities of the coarsest classes, with*

such ultra accuracy." But it is in the lower orders, according to our own notion, that the natural character of a people is to be best discovered.

"Now, then, my customers," he exclaimed, advancing to the front of the cart, "I'll tell you more lies in five minutes than you can prove true in a week. Now, missus," he continued, addressing a female in the crowd, "no winking at me to get things cheap. My wife's in the cart, and she's as sharp as the thick end of a pen'orth of cheese, as ugly as sin, and not half so pleasant."

A roar of laughter followed this sally as he took up a saw.

"Now, look here!—you never saw such a saw as this here saw is to saw in all the days you ever saw. This is a saw as *will* cut;—all you've got to do is to keep it back. If you was to lay this saw agin the root of a tree over night, and go home to bed—"

"Well, what then?" interrupted a fellow in the crowd, who wished to throw the dealer off his guard.

"Why," replied the man, "the chances are that when you came in the morning you wouldn't find it. Sold again!"

There was another laugh, and the would-be wag slunk away very crest-fallen.

"Now, I'm not going to take you in," he continued. "If you don't like these things, come again to-morrow, and I shan't be here. I'll charge you a pound for the saw, and if you don't like that, I'll say fifteen shillings. Come,—*you've got faint hearts*. Say twelve, ten, eight, five, three, *one!*—*going for one!* I'll ask no more, and I'll take *no less*. Sold again, and got the money!"

He now turned and picked out a cheap accordion, upon which he played some common air, and then proceeded.

"Now, look!—here's a young piece of music: the Appollonicon in St. Martin's Lane lays a dozen every morning, and this is one of them. It's got the advantage that, when you're tired of it, it will blow the fire or mend your shoes. May I be rammed, jammed, and slambd into the mouth of a cannon, until I come out at the touchhole as thin as a dead rushlight, if it ain't cheap at five pound! But I'll only take five shillings, and if that won't do, I'll say one! Who's got the lucky shilling?"

Not fifteen feet from the cart of this man there was another similarly laden, and a constant fire of salutations and mock abuse passed between the two venders. The merchant, however, in this case was a mere boy—he could not have been above fourteen, but carrying an expression of the most precocious meaning we ever beheld. He was no whit inferior to his adversary in ready slang, as his following oration over a two-barrelled gun will testify:—

"There's a little flaw in the lock, to be sure; but that don't hinder its going off. I sold the fellow for two pound to a farmer in Leicestershire, and I'll tell you what it did. The first day he took it out he fired one barrel, and killed six crows as he didn't see; he fired the second, and shot nine partridges out of five, and the kick of the gun knocked him back'ards into a ditch, and he fell upon a hare and killed that. These guns will shoot round a corner, and over a hay-rick; and they're used to fatten the paupers that are turned out of the Unions for not paying the Income Tax. They load the guns with fat bacon, and shoot it down their throats."

Of course this was a safe enticement for a laugh. When he

had done talking about the gun, which, however, he did not sell, he took up a whip, and, cracking it two or three times in front of his cart, recommenced :—

“ Here’s a whip, now, to make a lazy wife get up of a morning, and make the kettle boil before the fire’s alight. It even makes my horse go, and he’s got a weak constitution and a bad resolution ; he jibs going up hill, kicks going down, and travels on his knees on level ground. When he means to go, he blows himself out with the celebrated railroad corn as sticks sideways in his inside, and tickles him into a trot. Who says a crown for this whip ?”

There did not appear much disposition to buy the article, so the seller commenced a fresh panegyric.

“ You’d better buy it : you won’t have another chance. There never was but two made, and the man died, and took the patent with him. He wouldn’t have made them so cheap, only he lived in a garret, and never paid his landlord, but when he went home always pulled the bottom of the house upstairs after him. If any man insults you, I’ll warrant this whip to flog him from Newgate into the middle of next year. Who says a crown ?”

There were two or three other carts of a similar description in different parts of Smithfield, but these fellows evidently enjoyed the supremacy. How many profits had to be made upon the articles, or what was their original cost, we know not, but we bought four pocket-knives, each containing three blades, with very fair springs, and horn handles, for sixpence ! We had a little conversation afterwards with the first-mentioned vendor, who was, out of his *rostrum*, a quiet, intelligent person, and he assured us that at Wolverhampton the ordinary curry-combs of the shops were being made by families for ninepence a dozen, the

rivets being clenched and the teeth being cut by mere infants.

Beyond these features there was little to notice ;—the vitality of the fair was evidently at its last gasp, and the civic authorities did not appear inclined to act as a humane society for its resuscitation. A little trade was maintained by the sale of portable cholera, in the shape of green-gages; but the majority of the stalls were sadly in want of customers. Even the Waterloo-crackers, unable to go off in a commercial point of view, failed to do so in a pyrotechnical one. Had we waited until midnight, when all became still, we might possibly have beheld the shades of Richardson, Saunders, Polito, and Miss Biffin, with their more ancient brethren, Fawkes the conjuror, and Lee, and Harper, waiting amongst the pens, or gathering together their audiences of old in shadowy bands to people the fair once more, as Napoleon collects his phantom troops in the Champs Elysées, where, since he has been buried in the Invalides, he must find it far more convenient to attend. But there was no inducement to stay until that period, and we left the fair about twenty minutes after we entered it, having seen everything that it contained, and deeming ourselves fortunate in having been only once violently compelled to buy a pound of gingerbread-nuts, by the sheer force of a young lady who presided at the stall, and who appeared in a state of temporary insanity, caused by the lack of customers and limited incomes of the majority of the visitors.

END.

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